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A NEW GENERATION OF WARFARE The attempt to eliminate Clausewitz in American
Military Theory

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A NEW GENERATION OF WARFARE: The Attempt to Eliminate Clausewitz in American Military Theory

The bus ride north through the suburbs of Riyadh had been quiet as the riders pondered letters from home or perhaps what the night would bring. The Persian Gulf war was now more than 10 days old. The initial excitement of the first few nights of the Air Campaign and the foreboding of the SCUD attacks on Saudi Arabia and Israel was now beginning to wear off. Those of us in the "Black Hole" were settling down into the grinding toil of developing the daily Master Attack Plan that was the backbone of the Air Tasking Order for the coming day. Even the occasional SCUD attacks on the capital city of Saudi Arabia which had been initially frightening, had now become a welcome diversion from sifting through target photos, Joint Targeting Board priorities, and the pencil drill of strike packaging, target matching, and weaponeering. Most of the coalition members scampered to the bomb shelter and the UK guards of the RSAF building donned all of their chemical equipment. Yet some of us went topside to the loading docks with a cup of coffee and the ever-present bag of cookies or brownies sent from "somewhere" USA to "any US serviceman" to watch the SCUD come careening from the sky like a comet. In anticipation we awaited the deafening boom of the Patriot's ignition and launch from a block away and cavalierly scored them on their accuracy of intercept. Going back down into the hole I received a phone call from a Forward Air Controller in the Joint Forces East zone of action. He excitedly told me that he had a large concentration of what looked like T-72 tanks attacking down the coast road in the vicinity of Ras al Khaffi. He was trying to get through to someone to get him some air support but was having trouble getting through and he was taking fire. I immediately got down to the sector controller in the Tactical Air Control Center and with little difficulty hooked up with the sector controller who was able to divert A-10s and later AV-8s to the FAC.

Two years earlier on a dry, warm night in a different hemisphere it was the opening minutes of a less discussed conflict in Central America. I was trying desperately to make my way by foot to the Miraflores bridge. My mission was to receive a communication cipher key from a group of Marines on the west side of the Panama canal before the bridge swung open. Once the bridge opened we would be cut off. The purpose of the key was to allow the intelligence communications networks between the Army side and the USMC side to talk to each other. I never made it.

The contrast of the two stories is not unique nor revolutionary. What made such an impression on me was in the way that many things are changing and at an ever quickening pace. The latter was an example of pure friction in war postulated by Clausewitz. The former is an example of the effective use of technology on the battlefield to slash through layers of friction with rapid communication, decision, and action.

Technology is advancing at an ever increasing rate, perhaps greater than our military can absorb. US military history offers numerous examples of how we have fought wars with its cumulative effect on our professional military thought and service culture. Furthermore, all of our military schools from entry to the highest levels of command religiously study Carl von Clausewitz and his theory of war as a basic framework. What is significant is that in refinement of Clausewitzian theory over the last century we have not come far from his basic tenets. If anything we have done much to institutionalize his theories of war even further. The elements of Mass

Objective, Unity of Command, Surprise, Economy of Force, Offensive, Maneuver Security, Simplicity, etc.¹ as well as wrestling with the purpose and nature of war, uncertainty, friction, fog, the relationship between military force and policy, and the basic purpose of war have been drilled into the minds of military professionals from their very first exposure to the military arts. True, other non-western military theorists have recently been taught in our military institutions such as Sun Tzu, Mao Zedong, and General Giap but only when they fit inside our pro-Clausewitzian framework of a 'western' style of warfare.

By eliminating Clausewitzian theory in the way we view warfighting we might be able to better bridge the gap between thinking in the past and confronting the next revolution in military thought.

One need not look far into the past to see that war has not always been the continuation of [nation-state] policy by another means for all participants nor will that trend necessarily continue. In our effort to come to grips with how the nature and conduct of war will be waged in the future, the answer may lie with the need to repudiate Clausewitz by answering two elemental questions: What is war, and why will wars be fought in the future? Furthermore, the conduct of warfare will change beyond Clausewitz by the quest to eliminate the selected elements of war so intensely studied by students of the art. These are friction, uncertainty/fog, mass, and the Trinitarian elements. Much will change with the socio-technical upheavals in this and the next century.²

WHAT IS WAR?

War is a state of hostilities that exists between or among nations characterized by the use of military force. The essence of war is a violent clash between two hostile, independent and irreconcilable wills each trying to impose itself on the other.

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To even begin the discussion we must ask the elemental question of what war is and eliminate what isn't war. Clausewitz would say that it is an "act of force to compel the enemy to do our will" and that "it is the continuation of policy by another means".³ The Clausewitz definition primarily focuses on state to state war and minimizes the deterrent use of force or the threat of force to compel the enemy to do our will. This could be the

¹ *The American Way of War* Russell F. Weigley, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1973, P213

² *Jumping the Curve* Nicholas Imparato and Oren Harari, Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco, 1994, P3-10

³ *On War* Carl von Clausewitz, edited by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1976, P83. Clausewitz will be quoted frequently throughout this piece and will be so identified in quotations.

first departure in our adherence to Clausewitz as he sees this non-war face purely as a desire to wait for a better moment before acting " To be sure, much of United States strategy is founded on the elements of the threat of force to discourage others from initiating hostilities US history since WWII has not proven the wisdom of parity or symmetry at all levels of conflict as a preventative measure against war, but it has prevented a nuclear war in a predominantly bi-polar world

If we expand the threat of war to a "continuation of policy" theory it can be applied to most peacekeeping missions where the threat of force or selected acts of violence can compel the target to do our will. Would we call selective bombing in Bosnia war? Are the Serbs our enemy? One could debate both issues but the fact remains that the use of war as an instrument of policy has taken on a separate function than what Clausewitz would have envisioned. No hostile intentions or feelings exist on one side of the equation. It is a matter of behavior modification of one side balanced with the another side

The mission to contain or eliminate factions within Somalia thereby creating an environment for stability, could be viewed strictly as humanitarian in nature, police action in content, and war in character (as viewed by some Somalis)

Unfortunately for the Clausewitz disciple war has new meanings which could not have been foreseen from his perspective in time. Religious wars or the Jihad, ethnic wars, wars for existence, and weapons of mass destruction give far greater scope to what war is. Without doubt it is violent and forceful (actual or threatened) it can be with greater purpose than political policy and at times with no other purpose than total destruction of the enemy people without concern for any other ends All of the above, including gang/tribal violence on the streets of America or the cities of Rwanda connote the idea of fighting or threat thereof with the benefits *and risks* associated with use or intent of force

WHAT WILL WARS BE FOUGHT FOR IN THE FUTURE?

The United States has only declared war 5 times in its history and since the Second World War has yet to declare war on another nation state ⁴ We have however declared war on crime and drugs. Just a matter of

⁴*The Transformation of War* Martin Van Creveld, The Free Press New York, 1991 P314-317

sophistry you say? One can easily apply Clausewitz's definitions to both scenarios. Better yet one needs to look at the number of armed conflicts just within the nuclear age. Some of the bloodiest and costly wars have been at the expense of technologically superior western powers against religious (Northern Ireland), existence (Vietnam⁵, Algeria), national prestige (Algeria, Falklands/Malvinas⁶), interests, to name a few.

As this new era continues to unfold it is possible if not probable that nation states will lose influence, capability, and power to conduct warfare for political policy. Economic interdependence, social fragmentation, theocratic/ethnic/territorial nationalism, weapons of mass destruction proliferation, and diminishing resources may create an environment that finds the nation-state incapable to compel any opposing nation-state to do its will.

FRICTION

Friction is a wide topic ripe with examples in which we try to eliminate its influence in war. Clausewitz has many examples of friction, but can be boiled down to war's interaction with the human element.

From the top down in a democratic society there is great bureaucratic friction as well as within the military institutions themselves. While admitting the inherent inefficiencies of a democracy the Department of Defense has made great efforts to eliminate bureaucratic friction much at the insistence of the US Congress. The Joint Chiefs of Staff are no longer war decision makers but are advisors to the Chairman who further advises the Secretary of Defense and the Chief Executive. This streamlines the decision and execution process thereby reducing friction. This combined with the Unified Commanders in Chief as the executors of military power, have done much to further eliminate friction in execution. In procurement, the Joint Requirements Oversight Committee (JROC) process is an attempt to eliminate friction within war-making capabilities. While not yet in a mature stage, perhaps it will help eliminate the inefficiencies in a procurement process that breeds parochialism, sluggishness and ineffectiveness in warfighting capabilities further adding to the friction in execution.

Teleconferencing, computer link, satellite communication, Global Positioning System with centralized plotting of units, and instant information further reduces friction. A high ranking military official professed that the battlefield will be changed when a soldier in a foxhole (fighting hole for Marines) can flip up his notebook.

⁵ *Different Strokes* Bui Tin Far Eastern Economic Review May 4 1995 Vol 158 Issue 18

⁶ *Fight for the Falklands* John Laffin, St. Martin's Press, New York 1982 P77-81

computer and link via satellite to get an update on positions, execution plans and situation. Also, the ability of the media to exploit this technology to report the action increases the risk of imperfect execution thereby creating an atmosphere of perfect execution by necessity

Until the latter half of the 20th century the United States has felt uncomfortable with the large standing army. Not until the turn of the century when manifest destiny had run its course on this continent was the US Navy anything but a third rate maritime force. Most operational plans written between the World Wars assumed that mobilization and industrial conversion were the intermediate goals prior to military buildup and the offense. Furthermore, post W.W.II demobilization was confidently executed assuming that nuclear weapon hegemony would prevent conflict with the Soviet Union.

Unfortunately this proved otherwise. Moreover, a large standing military force proved to be the rule and not the exception during the Cold War. This is a long way about leading into the friction that existed in the mobilization and training of a military prepared for offensive or defensive action. In today's world environment, little time for mobilization and deployment, and the resultant friction caused, are available. Training of a professional military force has become the only cogent answer to this problem. To a surprising degree many of Clausewitz's human factors of friction have been reduced with the American penchant for continuous and consistent training. This training is designed to negate or increase the effects on warfighters of danger, bravery, adaptability, stamina, and enthusiasm. Joint doctrine may be at a critical juncture between service ethos and efficient force construction, but, nevertheless, is an attempt to eliminate ambiguities, inefficiency, and parochialism in the execution of force.

FOG AND UNCERTAINTY

The quest to eliminate uncertainty and the fog of war has been around as long as there has been warfare. Spies, observation balloons, aircraft, codebreakers, signals intelligence etc. have been used to lift the fog of war. The art or science of intelligence has been our primary defense against eliminating the uncertainty of war, but is not a shield and cannot eliminate the shadows from which an adversary operates. In fact, adequate warning and

surprise have been unequal partners in the American experience of warfare not necessarily from the collection or analysis thereof, but from the decisionmakers ability to conclude the right interpretation of events Today technology is being used to eliminate fog altogether in an effort to see both sides of the chess board and create the environment that allows instant decision. Satellites coupled with a new generation of sensors are the most profound change in an attempt to eliminate the fog of war. However, technology is not the only means by which to eliminate uncertainty

While we rely on the information age to propel us into the omniscience of enemy deployment, capability, and action it still leaves unanswered the intent of the opponent in question In an effort to eliminate this element, much effort has been expended (especially since apparent surprise in the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait) to conduct in depth psycho-social analysis of the opposition's leadership, command style, and execution logic Unfortunately, this seems to be an area in which Americans have not yet excelled and we still rely on intelligence and its analysis to provide us with reaction time (React is the operative word)

MASS

*A living dog is better than a dead lion
Ecclesiastes IX 4*

The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), precision munitions, and weapon lethality are changing the entire nature of mass to win wars Clausewitz states "superiority in numbers is the most common element in victory He however goes on to say that "Superior numbers, far from contributing everything or even a substantial part, to victory, may actually be contributing very little But superiority varies in degree. It thus follows that as many troops as possible should be brought into the engagement at the decisive point " We can extrapolate from this without liberalization that economy of force in conjunction with mass is the critical element to the successful attainment of the objective

Current thought about mass was evolved into parallel concepts of the decisive points and mass during DESERT STORM and continues to this day. Mass is no longer viewed as just troops, ships, and tanks, but is

viewed as a mass of fires throughout the spectrum of the levels of war - tactical, operational, and strategic⁸

Concurrent application of mass (as fires) is the modus operandi of the Joint force

The modern battlefield will prove to be more lethal as a result of WMD and precision guided munitions, and perhaps it will make concentration at the decisive point prohibitive. Even one leaking missile through the defensive ballistic missile defense shield will result in massive casualties. As a colleague so eloquently noted, "we must pitch a no-hitter every game." There is little exception for fear of abandoning the enterprise after casualties with no gain or risk escalatory warfare. The ability to achieve quick and low cost (or no cost) success is a primary element in all military operations orders and execution. This is not only because of the "Vietnam syndrome," but because of the changing social-economic fragmentation, and the difficulty in achieving consensus with the resultant political casualties inherent in a democracy. This is not meant to excuse or even accept that there is any other way but to conserve American lives in all execution, but the fact is that in warfare there is risk

As weapons technology increases and weapons such as cruise missiles with adaptable submunitions, sensor fused weapons, electro magnetic pulse weapons, non-lethal disabling weapons, and sophistication of special operating forces mass takes on a whole new meaning and the ability or desirability to concentrate forces at the decisive point will become less and less attractive

THE TRINITY

*The more I see of men the better I like my dog
Frederick the Great*

In the framework of the trinity, as espoused by Clausewitz, there are these elements

- The people: Characterized as the elements of primordial violence, hatred and enmity, which are to be regarded as a blind natural force
- The commander and his army : the play of chance and probability within which the creative spirit is free to roam

⁸ *Chariots of Fire (Draft)* Sam Gardiner, Rand Corporation P51

The government " and of its [the military] subordination, as an instrument of policy, which makes it subject to reason alone."

Clausewitz believes that the " passions must be inherent in the people " We have further interpreted this as the will of the governed to support the purpose, if not the execution of conflict. Because of the lessons learned in the Vietnam war, many view that the people should be more involved in the military equation. One of the conclusions is that in the absence of universal conscription involving the reserves and National Guard is a partial answer to involving the people. Thus, combined with utilizing the media to arouse consensus, were part of the successful formula in gaining support for the Persian Gulf war. However, the present and the future may signal the end of the use of a reserve or "militia" force to augment and involve the people. Social, ethnic, and economic diversity is going to make any sort of galvanization difficult unless US vital interests are at stake. Also, the ability of the opponent to manipulate (and this is not meant to be pejorative) US public opinion by creating the strategic events necessary to be reported by a highly sophisticated media will make creating consensus difficult. Saddam Hussein, Manuel Noriega, and Adolph Hitler were very easy to hate and arouse the "primordial violence, hatred and enmity" of the people. It may be difficult in the future to generate the necessary image of our opponents as they have become more sophisticated in the exploitation of mass and instantaneous information media. Moreover, it will be increasingly more difficult for the US government to appeal to the interests of an increasingly fragmented society. This will generate the necessity to act with little or no consensus and either conclude the military engagement quickly or to try to gain some form of consensus after the fact.

As a side note to this element of the trinity, instead of hate and enmity it may well be the people's ever pressing need for oil, water, food, or the prevention of environmental destruction, to name a few.

The second leg of the trinity is the effects of chance and probability and the "creative spirit to roam free" of the commander and the army. Chance and probability are elements that are no longer accepted in military planning. The cost of being wrong is too high and the need to eliminate risk is too great. Chance is being eliminated by many elements previously mentioned in friction and fog. Added to this elimination of chance theory is the ever increasing use of simulation and modeling in war gaming to aid in leveling out variables. The use of

the computer in war game simulation streamlines the process as well as removing the bias from the participants to a steered conclusion. Additionally, many levels of confirmation briefings are used to eliminate any remaining doubts about execution.

The ability of the "spirit free to roam .." is an admirable trait but one that may not be affordable in the high stakes game of 21st century warfare. This is even more true as the means are expensive and the ends limited. As an example, not only did the Korean war begin the US experience in the "limited war," but it spelled the end of the military leader who could cross over the line of policy in the tradition of McClellan by virtue of history, success, and popularity.

Of the government, Clausewitz and his trinity subordinate the military execution to the political ends; however this convinces the reader that the government lays out the political objectives and then lets the military loose on obtaining them and/or re-defining the goals. This is not the American way of directing military objectives after the Mexican American war, notwithstanding the chief executive's designation as the Commander in Chief. President Lincoln began a long tradition of involvement in military command during the invasion of the Shenandoah valley by LtGen Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson, C S A. President Roosevelt continued the tradition elevating the art of political leadership of the military objective to a sophisticated degree. To the debit it could be said the President Johnson took the practice to an extreme.

All things said, Clausewitz's theory of the government and its role of determining policy and then leaving the military spirit to deliver mission accomplishment is not a virtue of the American system of government or warfare. The degree in which this is manifest is dependent on the style of the Commander in Chief.

Even in the attempt to eliminate Clausewitz from military theory we do so only by validating some of his principles. Many questions remain unanswered as we try to grapple with non-state warfare or even if we should become involved unless vital interests are at stake. Clausewitz assumes nation state versus nation state in which there is a political, economic, military, or social nucleus at risk. While he does address partisan type warfare of a sort it provides no useable framework.

Technology gives some answers as we try to eliminate the effects of Clausewitzian war. However, this dependence on technology to eliminate friction and fog may also make us more vulnerable to a niche or peer competitor who will exploit our centers of gravity. This may be even more true as a hegemony of information and technology dissipates in the future much in the way that US nuclear hegemony dissipated.

The ever increasing capability to gain the nuclear advantage by various states spells a new age that will be not nearly as easy to deal with when bi-polarity existed to offset any nuclear advantage. Other weapons of mass destruction (which offer a cheap alternative to the nuke) as well as nuclear weapons change the density of the battlefield and make concentration at the decisive point difficult if not impossible. This drives the element of mass to another conceptual level. It also makes it easier to carry war to the American mainland.

The last intangible will be the degree in which coalition warfare or "peacefare," for the greater good of the international community, will mutate US military force structure and doctrine - or even if that is the direction in which we go. NATO relevance and UN sagacity may swing in the balance over what happens in Bosnia.

Balance of power in this 'New World Order' may be outdated for now. Unfortunately, Carl von Clausewitz provides no answers for the future and may indeed doom us to irrelevance in our concept of warfare for the 21st century.